

October 25 1973

Hills to the east were shading the sunrise. Due south, heavy purple clouds were building into density that brings rain. Reflected above the rising sun were the livid orange hues that stun man to silence.

Sheep moved from their bed grounds, cutting wide strips in the dew. Cattle were taking their morning fill. Wild ducks patterned a silent flight above the one lone waterhole.

A saddlehorn view of the Shortgrass Country is a religious experience. Human values are humbled by the last thrust of growth before frost. Mornings reach a beauty that can only be equaled by the charm of the evenings.

As all this appeared before me, I remembered that land like this is the same as the land that the government is offering to manage under the Land Management Act. Offering in the sense that the proposal could be confused with ordering it to be managed.

Then I thought of the sign over in the Post Office asking for ranchers to join the Peace Corps. And I wondered whether the worthies in Washington might be planning a reservation system for herders that'd make the Indian story read like the redmen had been given the state of Montana for a horse trap.

Land, we are learning, is handled best through the lenses of a transit or from the readings of an aerial map. Herders have stood around and let the times pass them by. Textbooks and experimental programs have put us as much out of stride as a racehorse shod with a mixed pair of shoes.

Ranchers haven't learned a thing by living on the land. Without experts and pamphlets, it's doubtful if we'd have enough sense to brand a cow or turn out the bulls.

I'm flat disappointed that the herders didn't profit by the experience of actual practice. In the time we've had to learn about cattle and sheep, we should have been able to write our own books.

Russia proves my point. The government over there won't allow the citizens to sharpen a hoe without supervision. Russian farmers don't raise enough for the country to eat, but it's not a helter-skelter sort of private enterprise system like we have in our country.

People are better off hungry than they are disorganized. Any dumbhead ought to know that it's more desirable to have a plan than a bunch of granaries full of wheat or a string of feedlots filled with cattle.

Russian peasants standing in line for food may not know this, but lean peasants can't think as well as fat leaders can.

Love of the land is a disease. The users and the owners are blinded by a passion that resents outside interference. Man's spirit, or perhaps it's his soul, becomes umbilically tied to the ground. Where Washington fits in this affair, you'll have to ask elsewhere.

The purple clouds did bring rain, the kind of soft rain that doesn't drive the birds from their perches or the quail from their feed grounds.

Glorious words are written about going to the moon. Right now I wouldn't trade my spot for a deed to the skies.